Introduction
Chapter I
INTRODUCTION

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

India was the most populous Anglophone country even before independence. Macaulay’s Minutes was an important factor in promoting it. The demand from the native population itself was no less important. Even after gaining independence the demand for English is growing more and more – as a source for modern knowledge, especially in science and mathematics, as a language of international communication and from several other points of view. In the school curriculum, though many states call English second language or even third language, it is given most importance – in terms of number of time spent inside and outside the school in trying to learn it, number of students who fail in School Final Examination for want of the required lowered minimum in the subject, in terms of holding the pass word for entry into coveted jobs outside the country and even inside.

Throughout the nineteenth century and in the early part of the twentieth century, only a minority of the population was attending school and with intense motivation. With the move towards universalisation of education, a large number of first generation learners entered school, but most of them found it difficult to adjust to the school culture, particularly the English culture. The problem is compounded by the large strength in classes, inadequate facilities, unqualified teachers teaching English, contradictory signals given by the authorities in revision of the curriculum, mechanical models of coaching displacing real teaching, incredibly liberal modes of evaluation in an attempt to ‘improve results without heed to standards. The result is that a number of pupils go up the grades without really improving in competency in the language. This study is concerned about this cumulative deficiency in English in a large number of pupils, which many teachers feel that it is not possible to make up.
Going into the etiology of the English teaching-learning deficiency, it may be worth having a glimpse of the relevant curricular history. The structural-situational approach had been in operation from the 1970s. The popularisation of this approach with Madras as the base as early as the 1950s as analysed by Manuel (In Exemmal ed, 2006) is reviewed in Chapter II. Earlier, teachers were using grammar-translation approach, closely following the text, giving the meaning of new words and phrases. Many teachers did not find the transition to the active transaction of the structural material with live demonstration and activation of pupils quite difficult, especially at the high school stage. Many senior teachers found the old method with much of the work done at the blackboard more convenient than situation creating, acting and associating. But inservice training was given to teachers in phases. By the middle 1980s when a reasonable number were given the training for structural-situational approach, and with graded readers which would make this possible, the approach was replaced in Kerala by what was intended to be communication approach. In this approach the lexical and structural grading in the texts was less visible. Even the communication component was not very visible or inviting, and the reading texts were loaded with foreign or not-very-daily-life-oriented matter. [But the content in some books had many other merits, especially from the point of view of the disadvantaged, but missed by teachers and pupils from the point of view of learning.] The communication components were given as supplements and exercises following the lesson. They were not spelt out and elaborated in ‘communication form.’ The books also cost much less then.

In the middle 1990s, communication cum activity approaches were popularised in language teaching in the primary school as part of DPEP and extended up to upper primary school. There were guide books as well as textbooks to explain the new approach. When the text-books on this activity cum communication approaches reached class VIII in June 2001, the books were abruptly stopped by fiat – apparently as a reaction against DPEP by a lobby. While the old books were being reprinted and distributed – it took three to six months – the curriculum was transacted by studying bazaar notes –
whose writers rose to the occasion faster than the Departmental mechanism which took the reprinting task at a leisurely pace as compared to the lightning stoppage of an approved set of texts.

Surprisingly, in June 2002, the books which had been withheld in 2001 June were introduced as if it was a fresh input, with only cosmetic touches. This model continued in Classes 9 and 10 in the years 2002-04. The present package includes: Course Book, Supplementary Reader, Practice Book, Teachers’ Source Book and Teacher Educator’s Manual (which incidentally cost much more). The present set of books in English present more difficulties and more possibilities before the teacher. The task is very complicated requiring mastery of dynamic language pedagogy, which is possessed by only a very small minority even among the trainers, (Vide Review of Literature, particularly that of SLAP – Second Language Acquisition Programme) If transacted well (which a small minority of teachers may be doing), promoting the acquisition of process skills, they are likely to develop real competency in pupils. The opportunities for pupil activity in the new scheme does permit a minority of gifted pupils or those for whom a Headstart has been given in English to achieve far more, irrespective of teacher competence. If done mechanically, focusing external tasks and products, which seems to be the case with the vast majority, the real standards could go down still further. This is what seems to have happened during the past five years in Kerala in what is potentially a good scheme.

Another issue is the preservice teacher training. In the ‘1970s the science and mathematics curricula were upgraded in Kerala in response to the world trends following the Sputnik syllabus. Teachers had to teach much that they themselves had not studied in the college days. So a single optional system was introduced including content and pedagogical analysis in B.Ed., not only for science and mathematics, but also for the other subjects. Specialist English teachers were produced in B.Ed. from the late 1970s introducing single optional scheme, but they could not be recruited for service in Government schools. In the earlier double optional system a B.Ed. student was trained to teach two subjects, out of which the majority of students chose
English optional because they had taken Part I English in graduation. So no recruitment took place for English specialisation. Teachers were recruited in the Public Service Commission on the basis of specialisation in maths, science, history/geography, etc and it was presumed that there will be sufficient teachers qualified to teach English because every graduate would have learnt Part I English in B.A./B.Sc. and the majority would have taken English as the second optional in B.Ed. But after the B.Ed. scheme was changed to single optional the P.S.C recruitment did not change for well over two decades. So, though specialised English teachers were produced from almost all the training colleges, none of them could be recruited for Government service; Private schools were free to make recruitment according to needs. This implies that in Government schools teachers unqualified to teach English had to transact a highly complex set of learning materials over which they themselves did not have much control.

After the activity scheme was thrown out in 2001 June without any apparent academic cause, and then reintroduced in 2002 June as if it was a product of the new dispensation; people who had nothing to do with the intricacies of the new scheme took over the task of enforcing the new mandate. Inspecting officers checked whether the new scheme was actually being transacted – and they were satisfied by inspection of the practice books and project work – in most cases copied from bazaar notes. The new scheme, which is designed to promote holistic activity pedagogy with interaction approaches with a cognitive component too requires the free, creative endeavour of committed and qualified teachers. Such complex goals cannot be realised through Government orders and mechanical operation of teachers and inspecting personnel.

Similar problems were noted in the other subjects also, but the marked change which baffled the teachers themselves was in English. The present books were more related to the environment, and some components of the book started with focus on life relation. It must be added that the earlier books also had activities and projects, but usually placed after the lesson and the other exercises. Most teachers omitted them. But now they had to do
these activities and use them for internal assessment and grading. With very resourceful teachers, the projects and activities were done well. But such teachers were a minority. However everyone ensured that even when projects were copied from an external source, the pupil showed his involvement by putting an outer cover, wrote his name and surrounded it with decorations or pictures.

There is thus a large gap between the manifest curricular input and the actual transacted curriculum. This has been the case for at least three decades. But the contradiction is most conspicuous now, because now the activity and integrated approaches are – after some initial hesitation for a year, with a kind of ‘Paradise Lost: Paradise Regained syndrome’ – officially enforced. But it is not possible to enforce creativity. Political scientists have noted that the state can compel a person to go to church; but it cannot force him to pray. The inspecting officers can check the products, but not the processes.

In spite of all this wobbling and sending of contradictory signals, one good thing has happened. An ambitious activity cum communication syllabus has been accepted as the official syllabus. The teachers’ unions too have accepted them. At one stage there was some hesitation as the SSLC exam of 2005 approached, especially about grading. But the Hon. Minister for Education (Sri Mohammed Basheer) who had reassumed the Education portfolio stood firm and saw the first batch through a dynamic and continually assessed scheme which is in consonance with modern approaches (at least in form if not in function). But the consonance was of a diplomatic device rather than acceptance of the spirit of the new scheme. Teachers felt sure that they will not be penalised for the lapses inevitable in a major scheme, for which they were not really prepared. But now there is the danger that they can get along without even attempting to prepare for the new challenges which the new curriculum extends.

The really substantial change in the dawn of the new millennium was recruitment of teachers by the Public Service Commission, for English, which
is a crucial subject in Kerala for the reasons stated earlier. But it will take at
least a decade more to compensate for the gap left during a period of over
two decades to ensure that a reasonable number of teachers in Government
schools are qualified to teach English. The position even now is that the
majority of teachers teaching English in school are not really qualified to
teach English, especially the new books now used, which contain deep
nuances; and depend largely on printed notes.

It is in this complex setting that the present study is undertaken.

NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Though English is a compulsory subject in the Kerala school course
with six periods allotted per week from Standard 4 (later starting from
Standard 3) onwards, it also happens to be the subject which has been
contributing to failure in SSLC Examination to the extent of 50% till about two
decades ago, later with failure considerably reduced during recent years –
not through increase in competence, but through incredibly liberal evaluation.

Part of the difficulty can be attributed to the peculiar irregularities (in
spelling etc.) and other difficulties inherent in the target language itself. Some
may be due to the heavy contrast between the mother tongue and English,
difficulty of making the transitional adjustments, for those children whose
home and local environment cannot help to build the linguistic bridges in the
inter-language phenomenon and the pedagogical bridges in the home-school
dissonances. For scheduled caste and tribe students living in the poorer
colonies and for the economically disadvantaged pupils from any community
there can be total alienation from the school. They may be geographically
present in the school but not intellectually and emotionally involved in the
school work. The Muslims in North Kerala have peculiar problems in
adjustment. In addition to the usual problems faced by others, they are
constrained to attend the Madrassa classes early in the morning; they have
to undergo additional strain, physically and mentally, working in the lower
classes with three language, and later with four languages, resulting in acute multiple inter-language problems.

Gradually the pupils who fail to meet the school targets become under-achievers and low achievers. The gap between the prescribed targets gradually accumulates and results in the feeling that the gap cannot be bridged at all. The students give up all hope that they could make up for this.

But there is a large section of the educationally disadvantaged population, who are still without any command of English – in spelling, reading, basic structures. The demands and possibilities of the new syllabus in English seem to have helped the above average pupils to work on their own and rise to great heights. They may even be able to speak natural English, pursue higher education successfully in English medium and aspire for high positions in life, for which a command of English is necessary. But the introduction of uncontrolled vocabulary and structures in an unsystematic manner with the weaker ones leaves them completely at sea. There are certain types of tasks in which what we would earlier call mistakes are tolerated so long as it communicates. But many of the pupils write some medley which does not even communicate. They are almost at the rock bottom. This position might change after two or three years of working with the new scheme. But at the moment we have to deal with pupils in the highest classes, but lack in competencies of the most basic levels. This is not a task which can be addressed by ordinary teaching and coaching as we now find them. They require special approaches.

It is difficult for government or its representatives at central points (Directorate or SCERT) to ensure the achievement of the lofty objectives embedded in an activity-oriented integrated curriculum – which can be realised only by the learners themselves ‘constructing’ the learning components with proper guidance from the teacher. When Government is assailed from several quarters about the high failure rates, and Government approaches identified experts to come with quick-fix solutions, they can only suggest prescriptions which will affect the externals and produce transitory
results. Studies have shown that out of rote-memorised facts over 80% is forgotten very soon after the examination. But such studies are ignored in quick-fix solutions. These prescriptions are taken seriously in Class 10. They artificially reduce the real curriculum to a very small segment of examination-testable items which could be memorised, reduced still further by fortune-testing probability games. Some of these are done officially. The test ‘curriculum’ – which is less than one-hundredth of the original – is still too much for many. On the strength of this exam-centricism a large industry of printed notes and tutorial establishments has grown up. The net impact of this is to distort the objectives and genuine processes of real learning. They would promise pass or even class for everyone who studies their material or passes through their portals. Some even promise even ‘ranks’ for everybody. Though only cases of the top ranks among their alleged clients are published, everyone has to have some rank.

The position now in Kerala is that in the general school system, the standards in English are very low. Though results in SSLC have been propped up by artificial means the majority of pupils in high school, and a good proportion who pass SSLC cannot write a single sentence in English on their own, cannot read a simple unknown passage and understand it and cannot answer simple questions in English in an interview. Many who sit in the school final class do not have the competency in English which would be expected to be possessed by a pupil in Class V. Even the practice book exercises of the pupils are full of mistakes, with a tick mark by the teacher in red ink, apparently acknowledging that the pupil has ‘accomplished’ the task of filling the page. The majority of free writing does not resemble English, except for some words or letters.

This is the problem of cumulative deficiency with which this study is concerned. A careful review of related studies revealed that this has not been taken up by any mainstream researcher at doctoral or project level. Manju has done one study on cumulative deficiency in English at M.Ed. level. But Manuel has been working at this area on a participant researcher model (with teachers and disadvantaged pupils for well over a decade). In the doctoral
study of Christiana Augustine (1996-2002) he, as supervising teacher, accompanied his student in participant research through the length of Kerala – from Kasargode in the extreme north and hills of Idukki to the deprived coastal area in Anjengu and the city slum in Chengalchoola, Trivandrum – meeting individual pupils in home and school setting, in small groups and in full class setting with self-learning material. Many teachers are of the view that cumulative deficiency beyond a point, say three years, cannot be compensated at all. But the Manuel-Augustine combination of head and heart has helped to bridge even larger deficiencies in hundreds of disadvantaged children. Manuel has also successfully bridged cumulative deficiency in hundreds of tribal pupils in Wayanad, Idukki and Agali (Palakkad) in project sanctioned for the Centre for Technology and Development (CETED) by the Tribal Department. The Project Report (2004) has been submitted but not yet published. The present investigator was given the privilege of observing and even participate in the two projects stated last which proved that cumulative deficiency could be bridged given certain conditions. The investigator was privileged to interact much more closely in a self-initiated project of C. Ramakrishnan and Manuel in the Government High School at Hosdurg, Kasargode district, analyse the extreme backwardness of the poorest children in the area, especially those belonging to the Muslim community. The weakest among the Kannadigas were also found in the school. [Ramakrishnan was a graduate teacher in the school. He was also Head of the ERU (Educational Research Unit) of the Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad for a term. After a long service he left the school about two years ago to service in a project at Ekalaivya (Madya Pradesh). Later his services came to be known to the Central Human Resources Ministry and he is giving in service training to primary school teachers in the Northern states.] Observing these committed people at work with cumulative deficiencies convinced the investigator that cumulative deficiencies can be overcome given certain conditions – internal as well as external.

The events mentioned in the last paragraph gave the investigator the inspiration to take up and persist in this study. It must be added that in
addition to the service and social commitment, there is also an intellectual dimension in the work described above with the very disadvantaged. Several disciplines such as psychology, sociology, anthropology and linguistics come to the service of pedagogy. Within pedagogy we are concerned with English language pedagogy in two modes SLL (Second Language Learning) and SLA (Second Language Acquisition) – the latter is a much more unconscious natural and informal process than the former.

This is the domain in which the study is undertaken, for the reasons stated elaborately in the earlier paragraphs.

**Statement of the Formulated Problem:**

Hence the investigator formulated the problem for research as: *Cumulative Backwardness of High School Students in English with special reference to the Socially and Culturally Disadvantaged Sections: Diagnosis and Remediation Models.*

**Definition of Terms:**

*Cumulative Backwardness* is the backwardness that the pupil accumulates as he/ she goes up the classes without making progress in English language competency expected as the pupil is promoted from class to class; e.g., a pupil in Class 10 may not have mastery of the competency expected of a pupil studying in Class 6 or even lower. This is not going to be defined in this study precisely and normatively as some MLL advocates claim to. But they will be estimated roughly, based on tasks set for the different classes, but accurately enough to discern the progress in filling up the gaps in the remedial treatment.

*Diagnosis and Remediation* is also not based on the models of large battery of diagnostic tests and remedial action, which actually requires an organized project team. It is conceived in terms of clinical setting in which a wide variety of ailments are observed and treatments ‘constructed’ according to need and applied. In spite of its seeming lack of precision as compared to
many psychometric models, this study is expected to show positive results in cases where no hope was expected by pupils, teachers and parents, and for which no psychometric model (Ph.D. type work) under our conditions is known to have given help in actual solution. In medical practice some doctors have acquired fame by effecting marked improvement in cases which had been treated in several ways earlier and no progress recorded. Some of them have analysed the details of treatment and results post-hoc to record specific findings which can be made more precise in further laboratory studies. It is this kind of broad and flexible studies which later teachers, parents and pupils themselves can do that is attempted in this study.

Models: Robins (1996) defines model as “an abstraction of reality, a simplified representation of some real world phenomenon. Siddiqui (1991) defines it as “a pattern of something to be made or reproduced and means of transferring a relationship or process from its actual setting to one in which it can be more conveniently studied.” Suckling, Suckling and Suckling (1980) see it as “constructing alternative, usually simpler forms of objects or concepts, in the expectation that the study of the model will shed light on the nature of those objects or concepts.” Joyce and Weil (1992) define it as “a plan or pattern that we can use to design face to face teaching in classroom or tutorial settings and to shape instructional materials – including books, films, tapes, computer-mediated programmes and curricula (long-term course of study).”

In this study there will be multiple uses of ‘model’ for which segments of all the definitions given above will be relevant that can be seen in the statement of results and to some extent in the methodology. For instance, we accept the broad principles of Joyce and Weil, but we do not stick to the rigid sequence and all the steps. In this study much work is conducted in tutorial settings which can be more helpful to focus on individual chronic low achievers whose potential has not been drawn out. Face-to-face teaching in classroom will be taken up only after success is shown in tutorial settings. Many psychometric studies based on Joyce and Weil models compare two or more models in classroom setting and apply ANOVA and ‘t’ to test the
results. The results may be valid for the comparisons based on average. But they may not give any clue as to how to handle the problem of cumulative low achievers.

**Objectives:**

1. To study the phenomenon of backwardness with special reference to cumulative backwardness in English.
2. To analyse the probable causes of backwardness.
3. To analyse the cumulative backwardness in English in a manner that lends itself to some gradation.
4. To analyse the errors of children and how teachers view these errors.
5. To study how the components of English that may appear dissonant from the South Indian languages could contribute to the backwardness.
6. To obtain the judgment of teachers on textbooks, course materials, and strategy-related items.
7. To develop remedial constructs and approaches and try them out in various settings.
8. To synthesise the results and process them for application modes by teachers.

**Hypotheses:**

This is a kind of study in which many relevant hypotheses will arise during the research. But a few hypotheses are set out in the beginning in order to give direction to the study. The major ones are presented below:

1. There is avoidable cumulative backwardness in English among high pupils in the Kerala school system.
2. Much of this backwardness can be attributed to cultural, home and school factors.
3. In particular the textual material and strategies employed in the transaction of the curriculum contribute a lot to this backwardness.

4. The way the pupils, teachers and the authorities are reacting to this situation has generally an adverse effect on really overcoming the problem.

5. The revolutionary approaches in District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), and particularly the Second Language Acquisition Programme (SLAP) developed as an extension of it in select schools did seem to show the way to lay a holistic, firm and dynamic foundation for learning of English as second language even for the most disadvantaged pupils.

6. The counter-revolutionary action in the curriculum of Class 8 in June 2001 was a negative factor in really vitalising education on modern lines. The effect was perhaps most disastrous in English.

7. The (at least verbally) re-revolutionary changes in curriculum in June 2001 which continues up to now do help the bright pupils to achieve far more than even before, but for the majority of pupils it contributes to development of cumulative deficiencies in English and errors, unimaginable by those who have not actually seen the practice books and other ‘products’ of the pupils.

Several action-type hypotheses were formulated even in the beginning and many cropped up during the research. [They are not spelt out here. Their content would be embedded in the statement of Results.]

**Methodology in Brief:**

This study used a large amount of analyses, observations (participant and non-participant), case studies, dialogues and improvised explorations in the qualitative methodology stance. After the field was analysed broadly enough to reveal clearly discernible categories, a formal questionnaire for teachers was also used to conduct a systematic survey. Similarly a
structured interview schedule was prepared to intensely interview 80 cumulatively deficient pupils referred by seven schools.

The Teacher questionnaire used for the survey included the following components:

1. Probable causes for backwardness (which could be grouped into (a) home-induced factors (b) home-school dissonance factors in language (c) pupil-school work dissonance factors.
2. Pupils’ competence in English
3. Teachers’ judgements on textbooks, other course materials, strategies (for teaching, remediation etc.)
4. Teachers’ views about the approaches to the teaching of language.
5. How teachers perceive the errors of children

Many of the items in the schedule were designed not so much to elicit facts, as to yield diagnostic and remedial insights. This schedule was administered to 251 teachers (Men 121, women 130; Government schools 119, Private schools 132).

The analysis of the responses of teachers was done by giving weighted scores, 3,2,1,0 for two items and 5,4,3,2,1 for three items. For each item, the total scores and item mean scores were calculated. In the tables presented in the thesis only the item mean scores are shown. In some cases a set of relevant items were grouped and group item mean scores were also calculated in order to draw certain inferences. Inspection showed that there was no marked sub-sample difference.

The causes and remedial modes were also investigated with the help of deep interviews with disadvantaged pupils, using a carefully structured schedule. 80 pupils identified as most backward in English by their teachers, drawn from seven schools were interviewed. The questions about difficulties in English, lack of competency at several points, present practices in
handling English, reactions to new ways of approaching English were presented to pupils in individual interviews and their reactions recorded.

In addition to these major schedules, a number of subsidiary schedules were also improvised as the investigator worked closer with the pupils.

**Analysis** included various types such as conceptual documentation, textual materials, language structures, dissonance, similarities, contrasts, Pupils' language learning components – products and processes, contextual/cultural factors, personal factors, intellectual, etc.

On the basis of this multiple analysis, a large number of diagnostic constructs were developed. These were reduced to a workable number on the basis of frequency, crucial importance, etc.

Then a large number of remedial constructs were also developed which could help pupils to overcome the defects. In developing these models the master models developed by the supervising teacher (Manuel 2002, 2005) were of great help. Whereas much of the practices recommended officially by the authorities amounted to simple rote memory of selected ‘probable’ items for examination purposes (with teacher dominance rather than pupil-initiation), the remedial constructs developed were carefully designed from the point of view of economy, elegance, generative power, transference, promoting insights, catalysing pupil construction of new schema, promoting self-confidence in pupils and enabling pupils to do independent work. Many such tools were written out on JK boards so that groups of pupils could work on them. Two tools need special mention: One was a self-instructional Question → Answer Transformation Booklet (Manuel) which would enable pupils to master about 20 transformation structures which could help pupils to finally write answers on their own to over 10,000 questions. After the new scheme came into vogue, part answer is often given full credit. Hence the same model was used in a different manner. Another printed tool was the phoneme-spelling perception chart designed to help
pupils to break through the maze of multiple spelling patterns for the same phoneme, and even that too without consistency. These are explained under Results.

A large number of case studies were also conducted. A few of the unique cases handled by Dr. Manuel with the tribals were also included, followed by the investigator’s own case studies. Many of them were actually case cum clinical experiments.

The remedial constructs were applied in several settings – individuals and small groups (in school or in the investigator’s residence). After experiencing success in individual work, small group work, finally total class experimental try-out was also obtained. This was usually done in the school.

In the self-learning remedial treatment the materials used by Manuel were used, supplemented by the investigator’s own improvisations.

The culmination of the remedial treatment was the preparation of seven pupils who had secured only D in English and hence could not be declared eligible for higher studies in the March 2006 examination. They were given remedial treatment for 10-14 hours distributed over. The supervising teacher also helped in the self-learning treatment for the pupils. All the seven passed, some getting higher grades than the minimum, going up to B+ in one case. This is considered to be a major validating criterion for this study. There are other validating criteria reported in the later chapters.

**STRUCTURE OF THE REMAINING CHAPTERS**

Chapter II presents Review of Conceptual Literature. The Survey of Related Research Studies is placed in Chapter III. Chapter IV presents a formal statement of the Methods used in the study. The Results of the Study are placed in two chapters. Chapter V presents the Results drawn from the two major surveys – with the pupils as well as the teachers. From the point of view of the systematic drawing of inferences about causative and remedial factors, this is the most important chapter. It also contains a brief analysis of
the textual matter, treated as one of the causes. Chapter VI presents the results drawn from the case studies and a series of remedial interventions including the SAY experience 2006. Chapter VII presents the Conclusion, which includes an introduction, summarizing the significance of the study, and re-stating the objectives and hypotheses, followed by Summary of Findings organized by Investigating modes, Summary of Findings organized by Hypotheses, Suggestions for Action, Suggestions for Further Research and a Final Synthesis (Models).